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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002142

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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD FAIILY KURDS - NOT SO KURD

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary Grappo for reasons 1.4
(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Baghdad's Faiil Kurds, a Muslim Kurd minority, continue to grapple with issues of identity that were exacerbated by Saddam Hussein's repressive policies. They appear to have little affinity for Iraqi Kurdistan and its leaders. Rather, they say they support PM Maliki's efforts to rid Iraq of militias, insurgents, and corruption and plan to vote for him in the upcoming national elections. If the estimated numbers of Faiil Kurds are accurate, at 2.5 million in Iraq, in the future they could be an untapped voting bloc that has so far been virtually ignored by politicians. END SUMMARY.

WHAT IS A FAIILY KURD?

¶2. (C) For the most part Baghdad-based Faiil Kurds originated from Iraq's northeastern areas near Khanaqin and the Mandali district. In 1975, Saddam forcibly dispersed the Kurdish tribes in these areas, stripping them of their land, homes and identity documents. Qaralosh tribal chief Akram Sayamir Bik recounted that prior to the dispersal, his tribe was comprised of 120 villages totaling 80,000 members. Those who were not expelled to Iran ended up in Beladruz and then were re-dispersed to Baghdad, Kufa, Ramadi, Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul. Sheikh Subhi Haider Qarah recalled that at one time he had 55 villages that stretched from Mandali to Wasit. His constituency was scattered as far south as Basra with the majority settling in Baghdad.

¶3. (SBU) The typical Faiil Kurd history is well described by 37-year-old housewife Leelwah Farhan al-Khatawi, who recalled to PolOff on August 6 several of her story: "My mother told me our troubles started soon after my birth when the Baathists seized the country. Many of my aunts and uncles were expelled to Iran. In 1968, many more were sent away. I was 13 when neighbors and teachers started calling me a foreigner, a spy, Iranian. My original "jensiya" was confiscated (NOTE: The "jensiya" is equivalent to a birth certificate. END NOTE.). In my new one, my nationality was changed from "4A" (indicating Arab nationality) to "13A," branding me a Shia-Kurd Iranian. I knew then I would not have the chance to gain a higher education and become a teacher. If you were Arab, the government would pay 4000 dinars to divorce your Shia-Kurd spouse. Our problem was that we had married each other. In 1980, Saddam killed my grandfather. He was a wealthy merchant who did no wrong. For years, Saddam's police continued to raid our homes and businesses. The night I was taken, they separated us into groups: old men to be sent to prison; young men to be shot; young men to be sent to prisons in Anbar and never seen again; women and children to be sent to prison and those to be forced to walked into Iran. We got word that the Anbar prison experimented with chemicals. The authoirties drove many women and children to a place near the Iraq-Iran border and forced

them to walk at night through land mines into Iran. Several of my cousins were blown up or lost their legs. I heard that some made it to Europe. They were truly the lucky ones. For those of us that were kept behind, I was considered lucky too. I was released from prison and married one of the few male cousins left of my tribe. He became a Peshmerga, and left with his brothers for Kurdistan to fight Saddam. Only my husband came back alive. The Kurds have done nothing to support our plight. We have suffered a lot.

SHIA OR KURD?

14. (C) Founder of the Faily Kurd non-governmental organization (NGO) Shafaq, Ali Faily, told PolOff that he established his NGO to raise awareness of Faily culture and its distinctive language. He claimed that the various magazines on the Shafaq website receive 4,000 to 11,000 hits per month. Faily confessed that the majority of callers to Shafaq's radio show (102 FM Baghdad), which broadcasts for 11 hours daily, want to discuss everyday trials and tribulations and affairs of the heart, but he hopes to expand the show to include political debate. Shafaq's Director Adnan Aziz al-Shafy said that Faily Kurd identity and population remains a mystery since many Faily Kurds find it convenient to remain under the radar and be just "Shia" or just "Kurd." Shafy was confident that once the security situation improved significantly in Iraq, more Faily Kurds would feel secure enough to self-identify.

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WHAT DO THEY WANT?

15. (C) Canvassing our Faily Kurd contacts revealed that their interests differ by generation. The sheikhs who were farmers lacked education and ended up working menial jobs after displacement. Wearing traditional robes, the sheikhs maintain their chieftain status, visit weekly mixed diwanis, and are called upon to settle inter-tribal disputes. They still demand compensation for lands lost and expect both the (non-Faily) Kurds and Shia to help. In 1981, after filing a court case against Saddam, a judge awarded Sheikh Subhi compensation of 1-5 dinars per hectare of seized land. Subhi refused the award. He now awaits another court decision based on his 2007 judicial case against the Ministry of Finance for land confiscation without compensation. Subhi has appealed to President Talabani, PM Maliki, and former Minister of Justice Shibli to weigh in with the court. Qaralosh tribal Chief Akram Sayamir Bik wants the GoI to reconstruct his 50 villages and provide guaranteed employment for any tribesmen wanting to return to Mandali.

16. (C) The children, however, received a higher level of education and have found work in many sectors of society though lament about the inability to get ahead professionally. Born in Mandali in 1947, school principal Ibrahim Shafi speaks Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Farsi, French, and English. Living in the mixed Baghdad neighborhood of Al-Shaab, Shafi and his family assert that they have not experienced any type of persecution. Shafi said that security and services are their paramount concerns. Also born in 1947, al-Watan newspaper Editor Salam al-Haidari settled in Baghdad, fled to Iran in 1991, but returned to the Iraqi capital in 2003 with his Iranian wife and three children. Their main concern is also provision of services. Shafi remarked that he and his wife will vote for any politician who can "deliver," and they believe that PM Maliki is doing a great job. Forty-four-year-old veterinarian Mohamed Salih Aalwan told PolOff on August 1 that he will vote for Maliki because he hates the Baathists as much as the Faily Kurds, and will guarantee they will never return.

Aalwan also plans to establish the "List of the City" political party to guarantee delivery of services at the local level, just like Maliki. Fifty-two-year-old High Court Judge Sadiq Ali Khanah told PolOff that Maliki is responsible for cleaning up Sadr City and Basra and that is why "hands down" he will vote for the PM's party in the upcoming elections.

17. (C) For the most part, the grandchildren of the displaced Faily Kurds have surpassed their parents' achievements. After graduating from top technical universities, they have engaged in business and traveled abroad; some even have political aspirations. On August 3, 29-year-old lawyer Muhanad Abdulhadi told PolOff that he is establishing Faily Kurd NGOs to fight for education rights. Born in 1973, University of Technology Instructor Jassim Abdulkarim al-Jaff announced that he is pursuing his doctorate in computer studies, travels to Europe for conferences and wants to run for Parliament. Although Jaff is not satisfied with the current government, he does not blame PM Maliki. He thinks that Iraq needs a secular and transparent government with laws that allow people to "live their lives." Thirty-five-year-old Ali Faily said he preferred a secular government ruled by a "benign" dictator as this would ensure Qgovernment ruled by a "benign" dictator as this would ensure the survival of all minorities. Businessman Ali Sharwan told PolOff that he would run for political office to help adopt transparent investment legislation. All four men believe that Maliki will be re-elected PM and that he is the best Shia leader that Iraq can muster at this time.

KURDS AND THE KRG

18. (C) Entrenched in Baghdad society, none of our Faily Kurd contacts felt strongly connected to the (non-Faily) Kurds, Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), or KRG leaders. Even those who became Peshmerga and fought for Kurdish rights against Saddam feel abandoned by the KRG. Both Ramzi Rahman al-Safrawondi and Leelwah al-Khatawi's husband joined the Peshmerga and harbor resentment that the Kurds have done nothing to better their plight. Even though Muhannad Abdulhadi credits the Kurds for fighting for their rights, he told PolOff that "they simply don't want to help us." Adnan al-Safy, whose NGO is funded by the KRG's NGO fund, said he does not care if the KRG loses its bid to control Kirkuk. He declared, "We should be thinking about one Iraq, not two sides!" University instructor Al-Jaff believes that there should be no internal border to delineate

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the KRG. High Court Judge Khanah stated on June 15 that Kurdish politicians work for the benefit of their parties and not their constituency. "It is their biggest mistake." Of the five Shia-Kurd MPs, only Samia Aziz is a declared Faily Kurd who self-identifies as a Shia independent. She told PolOff that the rest of the national politicians were appointed by the Kurdish KDP and PUK parties and owe their loyalty to their political parties, not to the Faily Kurds.

19. (C) All of our Faily Kurd contacts admitted that they rarely if ever travel to Kurdistan, and have no desire to spend time in such a "corrupt place." Prior to KRG elections, Al-Jaff hoped that Nawshirwan Mustafa's Change list would win big in the KRG elections because he wants all of Iraq to clean up corruption and move forward. He asserted that KRG's youth will vote for Nawshirwan only because he represents an alternative to the status quo. Sixty-year-old school principal Shafi stated that he does not care if Kurdistan becomes an independent state but believes that Kurdish independence will indeed happen after "decades." He said, "Defacto independence will come via economic prosperity. What is more important is that with prosperity and continued security will come political plurality."

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Iraqi Kurds usually have a fierce loyalty to their people and the KRG. Thus it is noteworthy that Baghdad Fairly Kurds do not readily self-identify and prefer to quietly assimilate into broader Iraqi society. If the estimated numbers of Fairly Kurds are accurate, at 2.5 million in Iraq, in the future they could be an untapped voting bloc that has so far been virtually ignored by politicians.

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